

The Philosophic Moment of Clarity

Author: Rebecca Marie Villelli LaPlante

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/506>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2007

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

The Philosophic Moment of Clarity:

An examination of literature's insight into
philosophical illumination

Rebecca Marie Villelli LaPlante
Boston College 2007

Acknowledgements

Professor Michael Martin
Boston College Honors Department

My fellow thesis writers
Amanda O'Flaherty, Becky Camacho and Kathy Wakeham

Donna Villelli-LaPlante
Randall LaPlante

Bill Clerico for the late night study lounge support

Thesis and W(h)ine Nights

Tyler Bates

My second home, 18A

The Mod-letes of 21B

Table of Contents

Introduction
1

To the Lighthouse
5

Heart of Darkness
33

Synthesis
67

Works Cited
71

Introduction

One of the most troubling, evasive and frequently asked questions posed by humanity is 'What is the meaning of life?' From this ultimate question springs the quest for some type of meaning and understanding of all aspects of human life. Why do humans exist? In what manner should they conduct their individual lives? How must each person relate to others? These questions are the basis for most religions, theologies and philosophies. These sets of beliefs which strive to answer this question provide a certain amount of guidelines about life.

Philosophers throughout history have sought to present their answers to these questions. Traditionally these philosophies are portrayed as direct examination and answers to these questions. Frequently, new words and phrases are needed in order for the philosopher to describe their thoughts. There are often hypothetical moral laws and regulations of behavior. Kant, for example, presents his Categorical Imperative, but leaves the reader with little more than that by way of application. In these philosophies, the reader is left to find the tie between the abstract guidelines and his or her own lives. Understandably, individuals do not seem to be satisfied with these guidelines as an answer. They provide rules, but no answer to the ultimate question in the context of modern social realities.

The answer to this fundamental question must be found through what Montaigne would refer to as the practice of assaying; a synthesis of ideas and

influences, formulated by each individual for his or her own life. One way in which these ideas and influences are presented to humanity is through literature. By illustrating the processes and insights of the characters in search of the answers to these ultimate questions, novels can successfully portray the philosophical moment of clarity.

Two novels in which the reader gains an insight into this moment of clarity are Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Each of these novels provides a different lens, focus and conclusion in the search for what is important in life and how humanity should view the world. While each of these works present very different views, they both examine the idea of a moment of clarity as a means of portraying a philosophy to the reader.

To the Lighthouse is a novel centered around the everyday experiences of the Ramsay family and their guests during two separate visits to their beach house. The character of Lily Briscoe is utilized as an observer of the family and guests. The events and relationships between characters at the house set the stage for Lily's moment of clarity through which Woolf presents her philosophy to the reader. Lily comes to understand the importance of relational closeness through observing the false sense of peace that is fostered by distance. Through her study of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily also comes to realize that the small moments of everyday life are what hold the most significance. These two themes serve to frame the philosophy which is presented in this novel.

Foundational to the successful portrayal of Woolf's philosophy are the characters and their appeal to the reader. In this novel, the direct connection between the reader and the characters is clear. Readers can easily identify with feelings of inadequacy, loneliness and yearning for love. Also easily appreciated are the activities of the family such as sitting down to eat meals, children playing and the act of interacting with guests and family members. Through the use of these characters, the novel skillfully engages the reader and aids in a personal identification with the presented philosophy.

Heart of Darkness tells a story within a story as the narrator recounts the seaman Marlow's tale of adventure into the heart of Africa. During the days of European business ventures into Africa in search of Ivory, this tale follows Marlow's encounters with natives, European trade workers and most significantly, Kurtz, a company legend whom Marlow is traveling up-river to retrieve. Marlow's experience serves to encapsulate the great realization of Kurtz. Ultimately, through an understanding of that which Kurtz learned, Marlow must make a choice between the truth of the darkness and the societal ignorance of light. In this choice, Marlow's moment of clarity presents Conrad's philosophy about a lack of certainty. Fundamentally the most an individual can grasp is the impossibility of knowing and that the choice doesn't matter.

While fantastical and presumably far from the reader's reality, this novel serves to draw the reader into a relationship with the characters through their struggles. As Marlow travels, his attitude toward the wilderness changes

as he realizes the connection between humans and this raw nature. The reader is able to undergo this transformation along with Marlow, hence aligning with his respect for Kurtz. As Marlow then makes the decision to lie about Kurtz's last words to his Intended and there is no consequence, the reader realizes along with Marlow the lack of weight that actually rests in the decision because ultimately the choice does not matter. Both worlds are nightmares and whether one or the other is chosen, they both must simply be tolerated. Through the emotional attachment which Conrad creates between the characters and the reader, his philosophy is effectively portrayed to the reader and assimilated into the reader's own life and experiences.

Although there exists a vast difference between the styles, subject matter and ultimate conclusion of these two authors, the device is the same. Both use literature, specifically character experiences of moments of clarity, in order to portray a philosophy to the reader. Through the medium of literature, the reader is able to emotionally engage and become invested in the outcome of the characters and conclusion of the authors. This engagement of the reader creates a unique connection which fosters the ability for the reader to identify elements of the philosophical application in his or her own life which is absent through traditional philosophical texts.

To the Lighthouse

While many novels portray extraordinary events through which the attention of the reader is held, in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the portrayal of a family vacationing with friends serves a much deeper purpose. Jumping from the point of view of one character to another, the novel succeeds in providing the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the entire situation unfolding at the beach house. Through this portrayal, three main ideas can be examined: peace as an illusion of distance, small moments as the meat of life and simplicity.

These three ideas are tied together in the moment of clarity of Lily Briscoe, a friend of the Ramsay family who is present at the beach during two different visits. Through Lily's observations of the family, Woolf develops a parallel between art as an abstract concept and life as art. This parallel develops as Lily approaches one painting throughout the course of the novel. At the culmination of the novel, Lily's moment of clarity is materialized in her completion of the painting. The closing paragraph of the novel reads,

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (208-209)

This visionary moment is built throughout the novel through Lily's observations. Although Lily achieves her 'vision' in one moment, this moment comes as a conclusion to the philosophy developed throughout the novel. The moment of clarity experienced by Lily is fostered through her observations of the Ramsay family and guests. Woolf effectively presents the reader with an understanding of the events and thoughts of the characters in a way that Lily's conclusion is fully supported.

The first point of the philosophy presented in *To the Lighthouse* revolves around the idea of distance and how, in its many forms, it can create this illusion of calm and safety. This distance can be physical separation of space, such as at the end of the novel when the remaining Ramsays travel out to the lighthouse, getting further from shore; it can be a separation of time, such as looking at past moments in life; it can also be the emotional separation between individuals, such as between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. These different types of distance all serve to highlight the general philosophy of false peace from a distance throughout the novel.

During the second part of the book, the remaining members of the Ramsay family return after many years to the beach house and complete a trip to the lighthouse. The journey is viewed from two opposing viewpoints; Lily Briscoe watching the departing boat from shore and the Ramsays watching the shore receding from the boat. Both Lily and Cam observe and comment upon the change that occurs with physical distance. As the distance increases, the peace of the object studied increases. No matter

what bad feelings or opinions existed from a short distance, they are muted and the good is seen when the factor of distance is applied. The negative feelings that Cam is having towards her father and his stubborn need for his children to submit to him are associated with their house and the shore because Mr. Ramsay has forced the children to return to the house and take this trip to the lighthouse. But Cam finds the shore from a distance much more inviting,

So she said nothing, but looked doggedly and sadly at the shore, wrapped in its mantle of peace; as if the people there had fallen asleep, she thought; were free like smoke, were free to come and go like ghosts. They have no suffering there, she thought.
(170)

This passage illustrates the idea that with distance, peace appears. The fact is not that the people on shore are actually experiencing any more peace, or if Cam were on shore she would then be peaceful, rather the distance brings the illusion of peace. Simply because the boat has moved far enough away from the shore, the imperfections and sadness cannot be seen by Cam. The suffering that Cam must endure in the boat is very real and current. She feels pressure to resist her father and the confusion of a mixture of resentment and admiration towards him. Not only is she physically near her father, but she is not able to escape, she is confined to the small space and kept in close quarters with him. This heightens the problems in their relationship. If Cam were able to distance herself from her father, this anxiety would be lessened. With the movement away from something, the level of peace increases, Woolf writes, "They don't feel a thing there, Cam thought, looking at the shore,

which, rising and falling, became steadily more distant and more peaceful.”

(182-183) Her feelings involving her father are so extreme and heightened that she cannot seem to escape them and envies those who, because of distance, she believes do not feel this type of pain.

As Lily Briscoe sits on the shore, she looks out over the ocean at the lighthouse and toward the boat carrying the Ramsays to the Lighthouse. Both of these objects present distance as well as emotional significance. Lily also notes the power of distance to add a sense of peace or calm to the observed scene or object. While Lily can see the boat, it is still real and she maintains a connection with them. As the boat gets lost in the haze and the distance, her feelings change.

The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt, they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things. It was so calm; it was so quiet. The steamer itself had vanished, but the great scroll of smoke still hung in the air and drooped like a flag mournfully in valediction. (188)

As Lily realizes, the distance pulls things or people out of the immediacy of the life of the individual. As the boat gets farther away, the Ramsays no longer seem to have an effect on Lily's life, but rather exist in a distant place which doesn't influence Lily.

So much depends then, thought Lily Briscoe, looking at the sea which had scarcely a stain on it, which was so soft that the sails and the clouds seemed set in its blue, so much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr. Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote.

He and his children seemed to be swallowed up in that blue,
that distance. (191)

The sea also purveys the concept of peace. It is not choppy but smooth, like silk without any disturbances. In this passage the distance is not necessary positive, but rather quiet and calm. The mournfulness of the flag betrays the possibility of this quiet as a negative thing. The connection of life is lost, and while that is peaceful, it is not necessary positive.

During the morning, the presence of Mr. Ramsay has caused Lily a great deal of nervousness. She feels as though he is asking for a kind of recognition and sympathy that she cannot and will not give. This interaction exemplifies the relationship that has existed between these two characters for the duration of the book. They, when in close contact, do not get along and clearly do not understand each other. Despite this conflict, Lily yearns for a meaningful relationship. She does not like that she cannot force her emotions to sympathy toward Mr. Ramsay. The sense of relief experienced by Lily upon the departure of the boat is shown to be incomplete when Woolf writes,

So they're gone, she thought, sighing with relief and disappointment. Her sympathy seemed to be cast back on her, like a bramble sprung across her face. She felt curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there – it was a still day, hazy; the Lighthouse looked this morning at an immense distance. (156)

The distance to the lighthouse is introduced in this passage as an indirect message of the false sense of peace provided by physical distance. Mr. Ramsay is no longer close and imposing upon Lily giving her a sense of relief, but is not able to shed the feelings of discontent completely. Mr. Ramsay

traveling to the far away lighthouse does not give Lily the satisfaction of complete peace.

Although the illusion of peace clearly exists when physical distance is applied, the distance itself is harmful to life. Reality is lost in this distance, replacing the vibrancy of life with a falsity. As Cam looks back at shore from the boat,

She could no longer make out, there on the hillside, which was their house. All looked distant and peaceful and strange. The shore seemed refined, far away, unreal. Already the little distance they had sailed had put them far from it and given it the changed look, the composed look, of something receding in which one has no longer any part. Which was their house? She could not see it. (165-166)

The hillside is described as peaceful, strange and unreal. This demonstrates the concept that peace does not necessarily equate to the lived reality. Life in its purest form is the close encounter with the chaos. Living with this lack of reality does not allow the individual to truly engage. If peace and distance are maintained, life loses its relationship with the individual. This disconnected existence serves for a lesser quality of life.

Objects lose their details and meaning with distance. Not only do objects appear unreal, but the small nuances which make them special and unique are no longer visible. Cam once again notes the distance when she observes,

The island had grown so small that it scarcely looked like a leaf any longer. It looked like the top of a rock which some wave bigger than the rest would cover. Yet in its frailty were all those paths, those terraces, those bedrooms-all those innumerable things. But as, just before sleep, things simplify themselves so that only one of all the myriad details has power to assert itself,

so, she felt, looking drowsily at the island, all those paths and terraces and bedrooms were fading and disappearing, and nothing was left but a pale blue censer swinging rhythmically this way and that across her mind. (204)

On the island, those things which are associated with both human life and the life of the Ramsay family are fading with the greater distance. Since Cam cannot see the identifying details of the island, it becomes simplified. It gets smaller with distance and so loses its overbearing presence. Small and fragile, the sense of safety which is usually associated with land is absent now.

This concept of distance as having a negative effect exists also between two individuals. When a relationship maintains an emotional distance, the two participants are not able to trust or engage each other. There exists a disconnection in the ways in which they interact. They are not able to learn the true depths of each other and so cannot experience each other to the fullest. Lily realizes this when she is thinking about Mr. Carmichael and how he has lived his life. Lily ponders their relationship,

Mr. Carmichael had 'lost all interest in life.' What did that mean—that? she wondered. Had he marched through Trafalgar Square grasping a big stick? Had he turned pages over and over, without reading them, sitting in his room in St. John's Wood alone? She did not know what he had done, when he heard that Andrew was killed, but she felt it in him all the same. They only mumbled at each other on the staircase; they looked up at the sky and said it will be fine or it won't be fine. But this was one way of knowing people, she thought: to know the outline, not the detail, to sit in one's garden and look at the slopes of a hill running purple down into the distant heather. She knew him in that way. She knew that he had changed somehow. (194-195)

Lily wonders about the deepest workings of Mr. Carmichael, but realizes that she has never gotten to know him on a deep level. He says that he has lost all interest in life and she does not even know what that life used to be lived for. This distanced and solitary way of knowing people does not allow for strong relationships to form. Without knowing each others' hearts, two individuals cannot truly connect.

Woolf uses the relationship between Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay to highlight the destructive power of emotional distance. While the love that exists between them is very powerful, they are both pained through keeping each other at a distance. In this example of a pre-existing relationship harmed by emotional distance, both parties recognize the lack of intimacy but are unable to bridge the distance. Mr. Ramsay notices his inability to overcome the distance as he sees Mrs. Ramsay across the room.

He turned and saw her. Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than ever he thought. But he could not speak to her. He could not interrupt her. He wanted urgently to speak to her now that James was gone and she was alone at last. But he resolved, no; he would not interrupt her. She was aloof from him now in her beauty, in her sadness. He would let her be, and he passed her without a word, though it hurt him that she should look so distant, and he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her. (65)

Although Mr. Ramsay yearns to reach out to Mrs. Ramsay, he feels incapable of connecting with her. His humanity is obvious in the sense of intimidation which he feels upon observation of her beauty. He has allowed himself to build walls around her in his mind which explain the distance between them. Placing her on a pedestal, he is unable to reach her. Mr. Ramsay clearly

wishes the distance between them did not exist. Mr. Ramsay sees that this distance is a source of harm and sadness.

Mrs. Ramsay is aware of this distance as well. She senses Mr. Ramsay's feelings of inadequacy and is thus unable to be completely honest with him, for fear of harming him further. His pride plays such a large role in his life and she must work around this in order to maintain the appearance of balance. These efforts by Mrs. Ramsay demonstrate the divide which exists. The burden of treading carefully and maintaining this dishonesty pains Mrs. Ramsay.

But then again, it was the other thing too—not being able to tell him the truth, being afraid, for instance, about the greenhouse roof and the expense it would be, fifty pounds perhaps, to mend it; and then about his books, to be afraid that he might guess, what she a little suspected, that his last book was not quite his best book (she gathered that from William Bankes); and then to hide small daily things, and the children seeing it, and the burden it laid on them—all this diminished the entire joy, the pure joy, of the two notes sounding together, and let the sound die on her ear now with a dismal flatness. (39)

Exemplifying the idea that human relationships based in love should be pure joy without the trappings of lying, Mrs. Ramsay is upset by this distance. The necessity for lies keeps this distance between the two and doesn't allow for them to close the gap. Until Mr. Ramsay is able to accept his possible failures and the imperfection of reality, Mrs. Ramsay will continue masking these and the distance between them will continue to exist. Mrs. Ramsay notices the shortcomings in not only Mr. Ramsay, but herself as well. She is unable to completely open her emotions to him.

And what then? For she felt that he was still looking at her, but that his look had changed. He wanted something—wanted the thing she always found it so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do. He found talking so much easier than she did. He could say things—she never could. (123)

Mrs. Ramsay wishes that she were able to express her love for him in words. She sees Mr. Ramsay as superior in the sense of words and expression of emotions. Being thus emotionally disconnected, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay each experience a sense of inferiority and wish to diminish the distance but are unable to do so.

The detrimental effects of distance do not only appear in relationships based in love. The distance is at the base of feeling alienated in friendships as well. An individual who does not feel connected to those around him or her is missing an integral part of life. Mr. Tansley personifies this in the novel. He is distant from the other characters and he is disturbed by the feelings of hostility that permeate this distance.

She was telling lies he could see. She was saying what she did not mean to annoy him, for some reason. She was laughing at him. He was in his old flannel trousers. He had no others. He felt very rough and isolated and lonely. He knew that she was trying to tease him for some reason; she didn't want to go to the Lighthouse with him; she despised him: so did Prue Ramsay; so did they all. (86)

The distance between Mr. Tansley and the rest of the vacationers at the house appears in the lack of commonalities and connection. He then feels this difference and reinforces it by pushing them away. The resulting distance perpetuates both the negative feelings toward Mr. Tansley and the loneliness he feels. His relationships in the novel show that distance can be hurtful in

relationships on any level, not just those based in family and love. The negative effects of distance affect all relationships, lying as a basic reality in human interactions.

To the Lighthouse explores the idea of the manifestations of distance in time as well. This distance provides the ability for moments to be frozen and revisited in memory. Mrs. Ramsay is thinking back upon an event which she holds in her memory, unchanged by time,

And it was still going on, Mrs. Ramsay mused, gliding like a ghost among the chairs and tables of that drawing-room on the banks of the Thames where she had been so very, very cold twenty years ago' but now she went among them like a ghost; and it fascinated her, as if, while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful, had remained there, all these years. (87)

While she has changed since that day, the moment has not. It still exists exactly as it did that day. In physical relations, distance changes things; temporally it allows for moments to remain unchanged. While the rest of life continues to change and grow, these moments will escape this change and be exactly as they once were for all of time.

With the beauty of these frozen moments comes the sad realization that it is impossible to stay in a moment. Just as that moment will always exist without change, the individual must continue to change as he or she moves away from the moment. No matter how wonderful a moment, humans cannot stop the passage of time and the change that brings about.

It was necessary now to carry everything a step further. With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it

shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (111)

Mrs. Ramsay is reluctant to leave the room immediately because she realizes the temporary nature of the moment. Although this moment will last forever in her memory, she will continue changing and cannot preserve the joy of the moment in reality. The change that time brings is continually pushing moments to the past.

Although while experiencing a joyful moment, the individual desires to stop time and remain in the moment, the existence of moments solely in the past provides a unique opportunity. Looking back upon the past, the distance produced through the passage of time allows for a peaceful examination of events. This is brought about through the knowledge of the outcome of the event. The uncertainty of the moment is lost and in its place remains only a pervasive sense of peace. Thinking back over old friends, Mrs. Ramsay comes to understand this.

Mrs. Ramsay thought, she could return to that dream land, that unreal but fascinating place, the Mannings' drawing-room at Marlow twenty years ago; where one moved about without haste or anxiety, for there was no future to worry about. She knew what had happened to them, what to her. It was like reading a good book again, for she knew the end of that story, since it had happened twenty years ago, and life, which shot down even from this dining-room table in cascades, heaven knows where, was sealed up there, and lay, like a lake, placidly between its banks. (93)

Examining past events through the lens of time, Mrs. Ramsay is able to approach the memory without negative feelings. She sees the moment not only for what it is, but what it means in the grander scheme of time. Distance

in time allows for the preservation of moments within memory and the reexamination of these events in a peaceful way. The moments remain, preserved, while the individuals must continue changing with time. Time necessitates memories outside of this change. In this way, distance – temporal distance – is something which provides the individual with the opportunity to both retain moments as memories and examine those moments with the full knowledge of their outcome.

Through human, spatial and temporal relationships, Woolf lays out the first aspect of her philosophy; Distance as a strong force on life. Sometimes this effect is negative, as seen in emotional human relationships; other times this distance is positive, seen in the preservation of moments in memory. Through the characters and their experiences with distance, Woolf is able to facilitate an examination of this pervasive effect on human life.

The second aspect of philosophy which Woolf presents in *To the Lighthouse* is the concept of the 'moment'. Centered around short periods of time as the vehicle which encapsulates the true depth of life, these moments contain that which is truly important in life. These moments are spread out throughout life; they may take the form of large, important events or small, seemingly insignificant daily occurrences. When life is broken down to this small measure, the individual is able to appreciate what life offers and the events of which it is made with greater awareness.

When examining moments, it is necessary to appreciate them in their simplicity for what they are. As each moment in and of itself is small, taken

together they compose life. With this understanding, the importance of each moment as a small but necessary building block of life becomes apparent.

Lily Briscoe comments on this while observing the Ramsays

And, what was even more exciting, she felt, too, as she saw Mr. Ramsay bearing down and retreating, and Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach. (47)

Through the combination of all the moments, life as a whole appears to take shape and comes to have meaning for Lily. Relating moments to each other and relating individual moments to the whole of life allows for a deeper understanding of the ebb and flow of life in the more grand sense.

Once these moments are identified as parts of the larger picture, they must be examined for their individual worth. Separated, each moment has something unique to add to an individual's understanding of life. Mrs. Ramsay is adept at separating these moments and appreciating that which is important in each.

She felt rather inclined just for a moment to stand still after all that chatter, and pick out one particular thing; the thing that mattered; to detach it; separate it off; clean it of all the emotions and odds and ends of things, and so hold it before her, and bring it to the tribunal where, ranged about in conclave, sat the judges she had set up to decide things. Is it good, is it bad, is it right or wrong: Where are we all going to? and so on. (112-113)

This ability to notice and appreciate the moment is innate in Mrs. Ramsay. Stepping back, she is able to lose sight of the filler material of life. Thus she can appreciate and make judgments on the moment, contributing to the life of

her family and guests. Acting in accordance with her gift of simplicity, she strips away that which doesn't provide meaning, and focuses on the heart of the moment as that which she wants to take away with her.

Once the heart of a moment is discovered or has imposed itself upon an individual, its worth can be appreciated and preserved. Lily unconsciously stumbles upon this as she sits on the beach, feeling at once fulfilled with the moment and wishing to preserve it.

The moment at least seemed extraordinarily fertile. She rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying it in the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illuminated the darkness of the past. (172)

Preserving a moment for its core meaning provides the memories in their most pure state. Much as Mrs. Ramsay is able to strip the unnecessary material away, exposing the underlying importance of a moment, Lily comes in contact with a single moment in its importance and wishes to preserve it outside of time. The joy she feels in this moment comes from the concentration of life in the moment. This is such a profound depth of understanding that it will remain with her in memory and sustain her even when she has lived on after the event contained in the moment. In this way, a moment becomes much more than a singular, isolated experience; it becomes an important and necessary part of life as a whole.

While life continues to move through time with the individual, changing and growing, the moments individually are able to exist outside of this change. They are what remains preserved in the distance of time. When one realizes

the purity of a single moment, a sense of peace is attained. Mrs. Ramsay experiences this peace and reflects on the importance of the moment as something outside of the influence change.

It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (105)

In the moment, she sees not only a greater significance, but the peace which comes when one is present to the moment and embraces it as a pure part of life. The existence of the moment stretches beyond the grasp of change, enduring as a piece of an eternal significance. The relation of distance in time and singular moments again strikes Mrs. Ramsay as she sits on the beach.

Now one thought of it, cleared of chatter and emotion, it seemed always to have been, only was shown now and so being shown, struck everything into stability. They would, she thought, going on again, however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house: and to her too. (113)

While the changing nature of life propels individuals forward, adding to their understanding of life, Mrs. Ramsay understands that moments are able to exist as a unique piece of the fabric created by this change. While each moment is necessary to build life as a whole, it is possible and necessary to appreciate moments without the weight of changing life progression. Through the examination of these singular moments at their most simple and pure

existence, a sense of peace and understanding of what is important can be reached.

Once an understanding has been reached concerning the importance of small moments as the structure through which the importance of life can be found, the substance can then be filled in. In the third part of the philosophy presented in this novel, Woolf provides an understanding of this substance as well. The characters in the novel each approach life from a different point, each providing something to the interactions of the family and guests. As Lily reflects upon the scenes and relationships contained in the time at the beach house, she is able to clearly pinpoint one person who functions in the realm of that which is truly important in life. Mrs. Ramsay is more deeply in touch with the importance of everyday life and appreciates the simplicity of ordinary events. This, Woolf highlights as of the utmost importance in life.

Mrs. Ramsay exists wholly as a mother and host. She immerses herself fully in the relationships in her life. Sitting at the dinner table, surrounded by the people she cares about, Mrs. Ramsay finds joy.

Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in a profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. (105)

Security and a sense of stillness overcome Mrs. Ramsay; not because of any particularly profound catalyst, but rather in the ordinary moment of sharing a meal. In order to find the perfection of these moments, Mrs. Ramsay realizes, one need only embrace the relationships and company of others.

Although everyday concerns and activities may seem trivial to some, Mrs. Ramsay greatly prefers them to academic pursuits. She does not follow the highly academic thoughts of her husband or the other men gathered at the house. She simply does not see a need to delve into these areas, when the true value of life is available in the relationships. She listens and attempts to understand if the topic is important to the person she is talking to, but she finds herself not being able to engage, but rather is intrigued with the person.

This is clear as Mr. Tansley and Mrs. Ramsay are walking.

He worked hard—seven hours a day; his subject was now the influence of something upon somebody—they were walking on and Mrs. Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there . . . dissertation . . . fellowship . . . readership . . . lectureship. She could not follow the ugly academic jargon, that rattled itself off so glibly, but said to herself that she saw now why going to the circus had knocked him off his perch, poor little man, and why he came out, instantly, with all that about his father and mother and brothers and sisters, and she would see to it that they didn't laugh at him any more. (12)

The academic topics do not hold strong importance for Mrs. Ramsay; rather she notices the human and relational implications of what Mr. Tansley says and how he says it. Although seemingly deeper than the everyday interactions, academics fall outside the sphere of importance for Mrs. Ramsay.

The richness of life is held in the connections built through relationships and personal connections.

Lily Briscoe becomes aware of this relational type of knowledge, as well as Mrs. Ramsay's wealth of this type of knowledge on her first visit to the beach house. She yearns not to be instilled with the book knowledge that the men talk of, but rather the knowledge that Mrs. Ramsay holds about interactions, how to make those around her feel at ease and how to find intimacy in relationships.

for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. (51)

Intimacy, Lily realizes, is that which will bring a sense of purpose to life. This connection cannot be written about and broken down into academic concepts; it is something which transcends the academic and pervades the core of life itself. As a personification of this intimacy, Mrs. Ramsay provides a grounding force for the community at the beach house. Individuals are not attracted to Mrs. Ramsay because she has the answers or is rich in traditional academic knowledge, but rather, because she places the importance of life in relationships and bringing people together, creating an atmosphere where each individual is valued and deemed important.

Just as Lily appreciates this quality of Mrs. Ramsay, even the academics at the beach house realize and admit that their lives are lacking a great deal without the joy of simple, everyday moments. Upon this realization, the academic characters yearn for the joy found in the richness of

relationships and the domestic life. Mr. Ramsay even in his desire for academic recognition yearns for something more, something which contains pure life.

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life—the drawing-room; behind the drawing-room the kitchen; above the kitchen the bedrooms; and beyond them the nurseries; they must be furnished, they must be filled with life. (37)

The house is the symbol for a life apart from academics and the professional world; it is filled with family, love, cooking and mending; all which Mr. Ramsay needs. He cannot be satisfied with academic accolades alone, they are not enough to make him alive. For this he must look to the house, his family and the simplicity of the home.

Found in the objects of the everyday, the house contains life. In the absence of the Ramsay family for many years from the beach house, the only things which remain as a reminder of the life which had once pervaded the house are the small objects. The life that once filled the house is not captured in the great books, academic works or those things deemed valuable by society. Rather in those objects which exemplify simple domestic life.

What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons; how once the looking-glass had held a face; had held a world hollowed out in which a figure turned, a hand flashed, the door opened, in came children rushing and tumbling; and went out again. (129)

The importance of the people which had at one point brought life to this house lies in their everyday activities. The memorials of humanity left in the absence of the family and guests can only be marked through these ordinary objects.

In a moment, during a conversation about government and important issues, Lily, Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes admit to themselves that they care not for these issues. These types of conversation cannot fulfill an individual.

Lily was listening; Mrs. Ramsay was listening; they were all listening. But already bored, Lily felt that something was lacking; Mr. Bankes felt that something was lacking. Pulling her shawl round her Mrs. Ramsay felt that something was lacking. All of them bending themselves to listen thought, "Pray heaven that the inside of my mind may not be exposed," for each thought, "The others are feeling this. They are outraged and indignant with the government about the fishermen. Whereas, I feel nothing at all." (94)

The idea that academics do not provide stimulating context of life is socially unacceptable. Behind the surface of academics, individuals search for more, but feel as though they cannot embrace something as trivial as ordinary life. Mr. Bankes, a strongly academic figure, although not able to embrace these domestic elements in his life, admits that they provide Mr. Ramsay with something enviable.

he weighed Ramsay's case, commiserated him, envied him, as if he had seen him divest himself of all those glories of isolation and austerity which crowned him in youth to cumber himself definitely with fluttering wings and clucking domesticities. They gave him something—William Bankes acknowledged that; it would have been pleasant if Cam had stuck a flower in his coat or clambered over his shoulder, to look at a picture of Vesuvius in eruption. (22)

Woolf provides Mr. Banks as a skeptical critic of the domestic aspect of life. But even in his strongly convicted academic persona, envy of the domestic influence on Mr. Ramsay is seen. Joy cannot be gained through academic pursuits. Rather, daily life and the intimacy of relationships appeal to even those individuals most adamantly convinced of their unimportant and trivial nature.

This draw of relationships and domesticity is based in the importance of simplicity and the ordinary. Much as the richness of life can be found in the structure of moments versus overarching life experiences, the joy of life is found in the simple. Looking at life through the lens of Mrs. Ramsay, the reader comes to understand the pure humanity in daily life. Inexplicably, this simple life provides complete joy and comfort. Emotions at their deepest level cannot be triggered by academics. They are rather touched by life; pure and simple. Completely overcome by emotion, Mr. Ramsay realizes this as he reads.

But now, he felt, it didn't matter a damn who reached Z (if thought ran like an alphabet from A to Z). Somebody would reach it—if not he, then another. This man's strength and sanity, his feeling for straightforward simple things, these fishermen, the poor old crazed creature in Mucklebackit's cottage made him feel so vigorous, so relieved of something that he felt roused and triumphant and could not choke back his tears. (120)

At this moment, sitting and reading of a man who is able to appreciate the simplicity of life, Mr. Ramsay lets go of his need to prove himself academically. He realizes this simplicity is what is found at the heart of life, these pure emotions are where importance lies, not in academic success.

This simplicity is exemplified in the children. Mrs. Ramsay, who truly treasures the simple things in life, admires and understands the valuable state in which children exist. Before being influenced by the needs and desires society imposes, they are able to function in a world of simplicity.

They were happier now than they would ever be again. A tenpenny tea set made Cam happy for days. She heard them stamping and crowing on the floor above her head the moment they woke. They came bustling along the passage. Then the door sprang open and in they came, fresh as roses, staring, wide awake, as if this coming into the dining-room after breakfast, which they did every day of their lives, was a positive event to them, and so on, with one thing after another, all day long, until she went up to say good-night to them, and found them netted in their cots like birds among cherries and raspberries, still making up stories about some little bit of rubbish—something they had heard, something they had picked up in the garden. They had all their little treasures. . . . And so she went down and said to her husband, why must they grow up and lose it all? Never will they be so happy again. (59)

Children function in a world driven by the simple things. Not needing deep explanations or extravagant events, they find joy in the everyday. They see opportunities that adults miss because as adults, society has conditioned the individual to look always for more. More complexity, more possessions, more wealth, more knowledge; but this adult mentality only leads the individual away from joy in life. Characterizing this adult world of academics, Mr. Ramsay presents this shortcoming.

Indeed he seemed to her sometimes made differently from other people, born blind, deaf and dumb, to the ordinary things, but to the extraordinary things, with an eye like an eagle's. His understanding often astonished her. But did he notice the flowers? No. Did he notice the view? No. Did he even notice his own daughter's beauty, or whether there was pudding on his plate or roast beef? He would sit at the table with them like a person in a dream. (70)

The extreme opposite of childlike wonder, Mr. Ramsay has lost connection with the joy that is possible through the ordinary. He is only able to consider the 'extra-ordinary' and in doing so misses the true wonder of the world around him. Mrs. Ramsay realizes that the heart of life, the most pure emotions are only available through the appreciation of the ordinary, and wishes that her children could remain forever in and that her husband could return to this life of simplicity.

Although Mrs. Ramsay exists in the adult world in which she sees a lack of recognition of simplicity, she maintains an acute awareness of the glory of the ordinary. With this ability to see through the external baggage into the heart of life, she more clearly sees the truth in things.

she knew without having learnt. Her simplicity fathomed what clever people falsified. Her singleness of mind made her drop plumb like a stone, alight exact as a bird, gave her, naturally, this swoop and fall of the spirit upon truth which delighted, eased, sustained. (29)

Her gift for seeing the truth of things came not from academic probing or philosophical examination, but rather from being in touch with the simple moments in life. With this ability comes the draw of her personality that those around her feel. She presents a comfortable way to return to this simplicity. She also creates a bridge for those around her who have long ago forgotten what the pure simplicity of life provides. Through Mrs. Ramsay, they are able to return to childhood. This is at the center of her ability to cultivate relationships and touch the lives of those around her.

She had been admired. She had been loved. She had entered rooms where mourners sat. Tears had flown in her presence. Men, and women too, letting go the multiplicity of things, had allowed themselves with her the relief of simplicity. (41)

This relief comes from being able to shed the unnecessary excess in life. Stripping down to the simple joy of ordinary moments allows people to experience a connection with the core of life. Through the attractive nature of character of Mrs. Ramsay, Virginia Woolf is able to convey the importance of simplicity in life.

Woolf draws on ordinary objects in order to highlight the importance of simplicity in life. In relationships, contained at the core of life, the ordinary is able to bring about peace. Coming together, transcending differences, simplicity touches the heart of humanity. Lily and Mr. Ramsay find this common ground, peaceful and pure during the second stay at the beach house.

He would have her observe (he lifted his right boot and then his left) that she had never seen boots made quite that shape before. They were made of the finest leather in the world, also. Most leather was mere brown paper and cardboard. He looked complacently at his foot, still held in the air. They had reached, she felt, a sunny island where peace dwelt, sanity reigned and the sun for ever shone, the blessed island of good boots. Her heart warmed to him. (154)

Two people, usually finding hostility and annoyance during interaction, found peace in discussion over objects as everyday as boots. Lily comes to realize that the negative connotation associated with everyday life only serves to drive one further from joy. Just as she and Mr. Ramsay were brought together in the ordinary, an individual, upon appreciation of and acceptance of

the magnificent importance of the simple is able to more completely touch his or her own humanity. She desires to reach this existence.

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. (202)

In this moment, Lily truly understands another part of the philosophy of life. Ordinary events and objects are what create life. They are the realm in which true humanity resides.

Lily Briscoe experiences her moment of clarity during her second visit to the beach house, when she realizes the importance of the simple, small moments in life. On her first visit she observed the Ramsay family functioning within the purity of these small moments. Mrs. Ramsay, who exemplifies an individual who lives life with an intentionally aware appreciation of these moments, had been the subject of Lily's observations during her first visit to the beach house. During her second visit, Lily begins to find meaning in these observations and in her moment of clarity, finds how valuable and significant moments as small bit of life are.

“Like a work of art,” she repeated, looking from her canvas to the drawing-room steps and back again. She must rest for a moment. And, resting, looking from one to the other vaguely, the old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularize itself at such moments as these, when she released faculties that had been on the strain, stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelations perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley

and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed it all to her. (161)

Lily comes to realize that she should not be waiting for grand, overwhelming realizations about the purpose of life. Rather, it becomes clear to her that this purpose and joy are found in the small moments of life. They are not only what come together to build and support the whole of life, but they hold the meaning of life. These moments must be appreciated, not glossed over.

Through the examples of the Ramsay family, this philosophy is placed in a context to which the reader can relate. The importance of life's daily events is shown through Mrs. Ramsay's ability to appreciate the everyday. While life, when viewed from a distance, may be considered one grand truth, the reality of truth lies in these small moments. Removing ones' self from the experience of the everyday only serves to create a false sense of peace. Only through a life lived in each moment can the individual hope to gain any type of understanding and peace. There may be trial and obstacles, but those also are necessary moments in the process of living. Woolf is able to use the lives of her characters, their successes and failures in order to present the reader with relatable examples of her philosophy. By recognizing the ways in which the concepts personified by the different characters are

applicable to the reader's own life or where these things are lacking, the philosophy has the ability for practical application.

Heart of Darkness

Moments of clarity need not always be a revelation of something one had never before considered. The moment does not have to provide a full answer to the question, but rather it is possible that this illumination serves to redirect or flip an already constructed understanding. This type of undermining moment of clarity can be seen in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In a traditional sense, there are certain associations made with the use of light and darkness. Light is good, safe, happy and dark is bad, dangerous and evil. This is rooted so deeply it never seems a questionable part of human understanding. Children aren't afraid of the daytime. Light is supposed to illuminate in such a way that the object of examination can be understood. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, this light and dark contrast is used in such a way that the traditional understanding is turned completely inside out. Marlow's moment of clarity serves to take another step back from even this understanding and explain to the reader that while these two worlds exist, ultimately a choice between the two is fruitless. The greatest sense of understanding that any individual can attain is to grasp that the answer to the question may not exist and ultimately, doesn't matter; both the possibility of truth and lie lead to simply the nightmare of existence.

Through the experience of Marlow and what he observes, one part of the philosophical truth presented in the novel is exposed. With one more level of removal from the story, another aspect of this philosophy is revealed.

Not through the reflections of Marlow and his experience journeying to and with Kurtz, but rather through a reflection on Marlow from the viewpoint of the narrator. The more broad view presents Conrad's understanding of the inability to come to a perfectly composed understanding in life. Both worlds which Marlow experiences are nightmares; in realizing this, he begins to understand that there is no conclusive answer in life. Just as the understanding on light and dark can easily be shaken, taking away any sense of a singular answer to what is 'right or wrong' in life, the greatest understanding that can be reached is that of unknowing. Marlow realizes that the most the individual can hope for is some level of understanding of his or herself. Through this understanding, the choice between two nightmares is recognized.

As Marlow tells the story of his excursion into the heart of Africa in order to retrieve a company worker, Kurtz, he provides an understanding of the darkness which he comes to embrace as truth. Kurtz embodies the idea of losing contact with, physically as well as emotionally and mentally, the pull of western society. He has escaped and completely immersed himself in not only Africa, but that which he sees as his place in this world. There is something about this escape which intrigues Marlow. There is a truth and strength which Kurtz possesses from his acceptance of a state of existence in which his primal desires are embraced. He has shed societal constraints and now sees life through eyes truly his own.

As the title suggests, the journey into Africa is a journey into the heart of darkness. Moving further and further from the influence of western society, life becomes somehow less normal and more truthful at the same time. As this journey into darkness exhibits, darkness is actually the state of true awareness. Only in darkness, or outside of the influence of society, can an individual live truly.

The contrast to this darkness is personified by the Intended of Kurtz. She is a symbol of the life of Kurtz before his break from society. She is blissfully happy while Kurtz is alive and blissfully sorrowful when he dies. While she believes herself to understand Kurtz better than anyone else, it is in the way that he is defined by society. He is defined by the effect he has on others, the respect he deserves and what society has to say about him. This type of ignorance is the type of understanding which Marlow comes to understand is not truth at all. It is simply a surface level of existence.

Along with the identification of these two types of lives, one of light societal ignorance and one of dark passionate truth, Marlow comes to recognize the greater philosophy encompassing these lives. There exists a choice between these types of existence, but ultimately, Marlow comes to realize this choice is fruitless. The choice makes no difference, and fundamentally, the most an individual can gain is an awareness of his or her own inability to know anything with certainty, and the fact that it doesn't matter. Conrad sets this through the outer story of Marlow's epiphany encompassing the story of Kurtz.

As Marlow travels into the heart of Africa, he has interactions with two types of people; the European pilgrims and company men who are working in Africa, and the native African savages. The Europeans are the force which is bringing modern societal influence into Africa. They see the natives as inhuman animals. In viewing the Africans as animals, Marlow is able to maintain a distance from them. There is safety in not allowing oneself to see the similarities between the Europeans and the natives. Marlow recounts his first realization of the truth surrounding the savages,

It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wind and passionate uproar. Ugly, yes it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of first ages – could comprehend. (62-63)

While observing the natives, Marlow came to realize that although many blatant differences exist between the Europeans and the natives, there is a basic human-ness which is common in both groups of people. Marlow is disturbed by this recognition of commonality because he must admit to himself that he identifies with part of what makes the natives 'savage' beings. No matter how covered in civility and cultural influences, each human has an innate natural draw to their ugly, frank, horrid acts.

Being able to clearly see the interaction between humans and nature, Marlow is able to pick up on the differences in these interactions. There

exists a clear distinction between the way in which the natives behave in response to nature and how the Europeans react. The natives act with a sense of familiarity and comfort with nature. When they are presented with the sounds and sights of nature, they do not seem distressed. In contrast, the Europeans are noticeably out of place and uncomfortable in the natural setting. They are very nervous and threatened by nature. As the boat travels up the river, a group of natives cry out from the brush. The sound is barely human, coming through the fog to the boat. Marlow describes the reactions of the two groups of men on the boat,

It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled in the chain. (69)

This difference in reaction is very indicative of the difference in relationships toward nature in general. The natives are able to approach nature, even that which is foreign to them, with a sense of calm curiosity. The Europeans are scared and hostile toward nature. The contrast lies in the basic view of the wilderness; friend versus foe.

As the novel progresses, Marlow's attitude toward the natives changes. He is no longer disturbed by their humanity. He sees them at much more of a level of equality. Although he still holds prejudices, he does not approach the differences with a sense of differentiation between human and inhuman. All

are a part of humanity, sharing many of the same basic instincts, needs and characteristics. Marlow notes this new view of the natives when he says, “Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity.” (71) When faced with the challenge of hunger, Marlow realizes, these men react just as any other man would. The influence of society cannot touch this deep part of humanity. Marlow is at this point able to refer to these natives as completely human beings.

Innate and stripped, the core of humans is able to relate to the wilderness. The wilderness pulls on each individual at a very basic level. Through the many layers of societal protection, the wilderness, or nature, still has a hold upon the hearts of all men. Marlow sees this as a function of the mind.

The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage – who can tell? – but truth – truth stripped of its cloak of time. (63)

In this quote, Marlow realizes that the main force behind the difference of the Europeans and the natives is the influence of historical time. As society changed and matured over time, the differences grew. Traveling back into the jungles of Africa acts much like traveling back in time. Stripping away the effects of time and presenting Marlow with the scenes of his history; pure humanity as it existed before societal influence. This purity is what appeals to even the hearts of the Europeans.

Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart, -- its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. (48)

Pulling at the most natural aspect of humans, their passions, the wilderness is able to overcome societal effects. As Marlow is trying to bring Kurtz out of the jungle, he sees this appeal to passion directly. Explaining this, Marlow states,

I tried to break the spell – the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness – that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. (106-107)

Through the passions of humans, nature draws in even the most cultured men. The mind of each man is able to comprehend the intrinsic tie with nature, and through the most basic passions, the wilderness overpowers the influences of society and times, drawing men back into their natural state.

With the connection established between pure humanity and the wilderness, the interaction Marlow observes begins to take on meaning. The two groups of men view the treatment of nature in two very separate ways. Much like the Europeans view the natives as something completely separate from themselves, the wilderness is also viewed without consent of connection. The Europeans see the wilderness as something to be overcome and conquered instead of something to be embraced. Conrad makes it clear that the European attitude of taking from nature is flawed. Men must attempt to live in harmony with the wilderness.

Based in taking, the European attitude toward the land is extremely contradictory to this harmony. Clearly demonstrated in the basis of the

professions of Marlow and Kurtz, conquering nature is the only way Europeans understand acting toward the wilderness.

Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things were wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. (54-55)

There exists no sense of appreciation in the work of the Europeans. Rather the wilderness is to be conquered, tearing away that which they deem valuable. With this sense of ownership and power, the Europeans don't allow for any amount of connection with the earth. Much like they view the savages, they don't think they have anything in common with nature. They do not see the wilderness as something to be respected.

This invasion of Africa by the Europeans is modeled by the actions of Mr. Kurtz. He arrived with the intentions clearly aligned with European views. He gave the wilderness little respect and as a consequence of this attitude, he was unable to work in accordance with nature. He created a deep struggle between himself and the wilderness, and ultimately the wilderness won. His inability to recognize or accept his own connection to the land led to his ultimate destruction.

Mr Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him – some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last – only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early,

and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. (95)

He realized only too late the mistakes he had made. As an individual he believed that his influence of society would be able to overbear the forces of the wilderness. Feeling that as a member of society he was more complete than the natives only led him to be negatively affected by nature instead of lifted up to an understanding of his basic humanity.

'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my –' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. (81)

Placing himself in a position of power and superiority over the natives and the land, he convinced himself that he had a right to act in these destructive ways toward them. But in reality he was acting destructively toward the part of himself that was connected to the wilderness. The natural passion which he holds at his core is the thing that he ultimately pushes away, along with the wilderness. Not until the very end of his life was he able to see that he had no claim over the land, but rather that the wilderness had claim over his humanity. He ignored that which was common to him and nature, and in doing so, left a void which grew until it destroyed him.

Marlow also meets a young Russian in the jungle who presents an example of how living in accordance with the wilderness. The youth does not look at the wilderness with any sense of greed. He seeks to simply exist in

nature, not take anything forcefully. This approach allows him to appreciate the wilderness as a force to be respected.

He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. (90-91)

This type of existence, outside of reason, driven by the passion to exist, is a life lived within the very center of what makes the youth human. While living in such a way that acknowledged the commonality between his own human nature and the wilderness, the destruction which ruined Mr Kurtz did not affect the Russian youth. He was able to move about freely in the jungle and remain untouched by negative effects because he did not place his societal expectations in direct opposition to the wilderness.

Through the personification of modern society through the character of Mr. Kurtz, Conrad is able to highlight the faultiness of the belief held in society of the wilderness as an entity under the control of society. Marlow observes, "The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free." (62) While men believe that they have tamed the wilderness into the definitions which society dictates, when faced, as Marlow was, with the purity and truth of the wilderness, it becomes apparent that nothing society could ever do would control nature. Because of the innate connection between humanity and the wilderness, it is impossible to succeed in removing the power and influence of nature completely.

The wilderness becomes a dangerous force only when the individual is not willing to let go of society. It is possible to live a life completely in denial of human innate nature, but once the individual has been exposed to the truth which the wilderness presents, it is necessary to allow oneself to become 'lost' in the wilderness to reach this greater truth. By knowingly disowning the wild passions at the core of humanity, the individual internalizes a losing battle. Because this tie to the wilderness is contained at the core of humanity, it is impossible to escape it. While some never realize their own natural self and are able to cover these attributes with societal rules and ideas, once the individual has reached a state of realization, it is impossible to completely escape.

Each person born into the world governed by modern society is influenced to build a frame of reference within this society. The norms, values and habits of society are built into this reference. Problems arise because this societal frame only allows for domesticated human passions. In order to get in touch with true humanity, the individual must let go of this societal frame of reference. This concept is symbolized through the boat traveling up the river. A thick fog moves in, cutting off their ability to define their surroundings through any familiarity. "The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind." (68) As they consider lifting the anchor to attempt moving upstream, Marlow states,

Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air – in space. We wouldn't be able to tell

where we were going to – whether up or down stream, or across – till we fetched against one bank or the other, -- and then we wouldn't know at first which it was. (72)

Although the wilderness presents an unfamiliar reality, it is necessary to embrace this reality as the true nature of humanity. In order to do this, one must let go of their grasp on society. With the expectations and views of society, it is impossible to accept the wilderness for what it is. The passions which nature appeals to are those which society teaches the individual to ignore. This conflict creates the need for the release of societal constructs in order to find the deeper truth of the wilderness.

Although letting go of the societal frame of reference is an incredibly scary idea, Marlow realizes that the sense of being disconnected from societal origin is not dire. Experiencing this state of disconnection, the individual realizes that they are insignificant compared to the wilderness. The feeling of being completely at the mercy of the wilderness and its draw on human passion illustrates the lack of power that man, as a socially constructed being, has over any aspect of nature. Marlow observes,

Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing that feeling. (61)

While the feelings of being insignificant and lost are construed as negative by society, Marlow realizes that he is able to find a sense of peace. As nature is connected to humans, so the state of humans in relation to nature holds an element of what is innate. While society builds men up to be supreme beings,

this is a disillusionment which is detrimental in finding out the true place of humans. They are not rulers of the earth, but rather must respect nature for its awesome power over the individual.

Once outside of the societal sphere the rules of society are no longer applicable. The rules which govern the ideas of power and ranking are completely disregarded. Much like men are defined in a new relationship of power toward nature, this change also affects their relationships with each other. Two of the workers discuss this fact as Marlow listens.

Anything – anything can be done in this country. That’s what I say; nobody here, you understand, here, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate – you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe. (57-58)

As the Europeans realize that the laws of human interaction from Europe no longer apply in Africa, they begin to take steps toward a more natural way of acting. Traditional corporate definitions are abandoned and each individual is placed in the position of simply, human being. The power comes from being able to listen to the passions which correspond to nature and allow them to orchestrate one’s actions. Through this realization, the idea of greater truth through a stripping of societal definitions of interpersonal relationships is clearly established.

Once the constraints of society and relationships have been disassembled, all that is left to examine is the interior of the individual. Marlow sees the struggle of this examination as he observes Kurtz. He has become so separated from society and others, that his only remaining frontier is himself. Unfortunately, Kurtz is not able to accept himself, as a being in

nature, and so struggles with even his own identity. Because of this inability to embrace his inner wilderness, Kurtz has been driven mad through his soul's struggle with itself. Marlow observes,

But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had – for my sins, I suppose – to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it – I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. (107-108)

Kurtz has disassociated himself from society, but instead of accepting the nature that he holds at his core of being, he is driven mad in struggling with himself. His sincerity can not save him from madness. Having spent so much time fighting internally, he loses all ability to recognize himself. By trying to impart the same influence on his own heart as on the heart of Africa, Kurtz is unable to live with even himself. Kurtz realizes that although he is attempting to search his soul for a deeper truth, it is a blind struggle. Conrad uses this example to show not only the soul's struggle with itself, but the ultimate lack of direction in this search.

Conrad emphasizes the importance of inward examination; its purpose being to search for and connect with the earthly part of humanity. Without this connection to the wilderness, the core of human nature makes no sense. Hence, when Kurtz lets go of all connection with the earth, he is working against his own self understanding.

There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before

him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. (107)

Kurtz is able to disconnect completely from nature, but in doing so, loses all moral orientation, driving himself mad. He has destroyed his connections with society, others and ultimately his own soul as a part of nature.

Throughout the novel, the imagery is inundated with the usage of light and dark. Although this usage is nothing revolutionary, Conrad's symbolism behind the light and dark presents the reader with an entirely new view of their meanings. The contrast seen between the influences of the wilderness and society is mimicked by the contrast between dark and light. The characters are presented with the choice between light and dark in order to find the deeper truth. Fitting within the traditional usage, society is portrayed as light while the wilderness is characterized by darkness. Conrad questions the correlation between light and good, dark and bad. The narrator describes the Director of Companies, "He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realise his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom." (15) Traditionally, light symbolizes the good and dark symbolizes the bad. Conrad uses the light to symbolize the negative effects of society and dark to symbolize the truth of the wilderness.

The Europeans who venture into the jungle of Africa are seen as bearers of light. Paralleling the way in which they bring societal expectations and influences into Africa, this lightness is used as an examination of this society in relation to the true humanity of the individual. Marlow explains

them as, "Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire." (17) While traditionally, and from a societal view, this light holds a greater truth than anything found in nature. As the Europeans encounter the wilderness, they consider themselves as bringing salvation. This societal view is exactly what Marlow begins to question, and ultimately is overturned in the novel.

Another representation of light which is normally considered to be a positive force is that of the sun. The sun brings life and heat to the earth. The sun traditionally represents safety, for example with children who are not afraid during the day time; or the general sentiment of happiness which pervades a sunny day. But as the influence of light is re-examined in this novel, the force of the sun can be seen in a negative way as well. "An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine." (59) As Marlow travels deeper into the jungle, getting closer to complete wilderness, the sun becomes something which no longer bears the happiness which society has assigned it. Changing in this way, the sun becomes another symbol of the negative societal influence.

Light, no matter how strongly perceived by society is an impermanent force. It cannot ever completely overpower the dark. This is true not only for Marlow, but for the overarching idea of society versus nature. From the view of an individual who has only ever experiences light, the darkness seems

inferior and something to be taken over. Marlow understands that because this darkness exists below and before the influence of society, it will always have a hold on men. As he begins his story Marlow remarks on the progress of society

I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago – the other day. . . Light came out of this river since – you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker – may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. (19)

Although history studies and examines the progress of the light overpowering the darkness, the aspect which it does not understand is that the darkness is the beginning of all light. Necessary as a beginning, the darkness lies concealed in the hearts of all men. Time and societal impact only serve to cover this beginning. Despite its hidden state, the dark remains at the beginning of all things light and because of this will never be gone.

The darkness as a symbol for the truth of pure wilderness as the core of humanity is first introduced through the imagery of Africa. As the group travels further up the river, the closer to the truth they get. The term used in reference is the 'heart of darkness' which is the destination of the journey. As they travel up the river, Marlow describes their progress,

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. (61-62)

As the heart of darkness is approached, the wilderness gets more intense and Marlow travels toward his understanding of this wilderness as a force

upon humanity. The wilderness is constantly tied to the symbol of darkness. This is not simply the lack of daylight, but rather an overpowering entity which imposes itself upon the sources of light.

In correlation with the shift of light from the traditional usage, the dark changes directly in accordance with this same shift. The dark no longer is representative of evil, but becomes that which is attached to knowledge and truth. The wilderness of Africa presents this darkness throughout the novel. The savages are dark in their skin color and the continent of Africa itself is dark. Marlow describes how this change occurs through his childhood fascination with the continent of Africa on maps and its seemingly unknown vastness,

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. (22)

As the knowledge of Africa spread, through the exploration, the map had been filled. The large white space representing lack of knowledge is replaced with the darkness of the true knowledge of the wilderness. Africa as a representation of the wilderness free of societal influence maintains this darkness throughout the novel.

Looking further into the imagery of light and dark, it becomes apparent that the light as a symbol of society is representative of more than simply human progress, but more deeply the ignorance which surrounds society. In contrast, the darkness is deep truth which exists in the wilderness. This

ignorance is the inability and unwillingness to discover the truth contained in the darkness. While in the cabin of a company official who is trying to find out about Marlow's contacts in Europe which have landed him such a good position, Marlow notices an image that captures his attention,

At last he got angry, and, to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister. (46-47)

This painting is the epitome of the contrast of light and dark. The blindfold on the woman symbolizes the ignorance found in the Europeans. While a torch is typically used to make clear the true state of things, the exact opposite has happened. By carrying the light, the Europeans are able to convince themselves that the truth they have created is real, while in reality they have blinded themselves to the heart of man and the dark wilderness which exists within each individual, holding the truth of humanity in its purest form.

Neither the progress of society nor the application of light is able to bring clarity to the search for deeper meaning in the examination of the human core. As Marlow travels into the wilderness, he notices the light brought in by the Europeans. As the symbol of society, this light feels familiar, and yet the characters sense that familiarity is not a positive thing.

As Marlow begins his story, he talks about reaching Kurtz in the jungle,

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me – and into my thoughts. It was somber enough too – and pitiful – not extraordinary in any way – not

very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light. (21)

As Marlow travels up the river, the influence of society upon the Europeans is clearly observed. Their lack of acceptance of the wilderness and their own true selves is portrayed through this light. They believe the light to be a source of illumination and understanding, when in reality it does not clarify the questions their humanity poses to them. In this sense, the phrase 'a kind of light' serves to illustrate the uncertainty and indefinable quality of this illumination. It is not really illumination at all, for nothing becomes clear.

The influence of light upon the dark is not only seen in abstract ways, but clearly demonstrated through the treatment of the savages by the Europeans. The Europeans do not understand the way in which the natives embrace the wilderness and live in harmony with nature. The general sentiment of taking over nature in order to achieve the ends of company profits and societal recognition are used upon the natives as well. Marlow comes upon one native,

He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck – Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge – an ornament – a charm – a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas. (35)

Symbolizing the influence 'from beyond the seas', the white thread shocks Marlow because of the contrast against the native's black neck which is completely a part of the wilderness. By placing the white or light object, brought by the Europeans around the neck of the black savage, pulled out of the deep wilderness of Africa, the idea that the light is choking to the wild

nature of the darkness is communicated. Through this representation, Conrad further demonstrates the idea that the influence of the Europeans is not saving the savages, but rather the influence of the light is negative, and stripping the life out of the wilderness.

As Mr. Kurtz struggles between the two worlds, the light of the European society and the darkness of nature, he destroys himself. He realizes the truth that lies in nature only too late. Wishing to take over nature for the majority of this time in Africa, he exacts the revenge of the wilderness. Toward the very end of his life, he realizes the truth that lies in the wilderness and attempts to run toward this. He cuts ties with the European trading company and sheds the blindfold of light which he has been imposing upon himself. When Marlow comes to bring Kurtz back down the river, Kurtz has gone mad with the internal struggle. Under Marlow's care, Kurtz tries to escape. Marlow recounts, "I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there." (104) At this point, Kurtz has realized that the only possible way to save himself is to succumb to the power of nature over him. He is considered to have gone mad by the Europeans because they do not understand. While being held upon the boat, he realizes that if he does not return to the wilderness, he will inevitably be destroyed by being forced into the societal light. By breaking out of the cabin, Kurtz is showing that if an understanding of the truth contained in the wilderness is reached, the only desire that an individual is able to follow is a search for this truth.

The influence of the wilderness upon Kurtz is obvious as he nears death. He has gone mad through his struggle to save himself from the wilderness, but upon the threshold of death he finally accepts the darkness. The darkness fully consumes Kurtz and makes him, finally, completely one with the wilderness. Shortly before his death, Kurtz is so consumed by the darkness that he cannot even see the light. Marlow recounts,

One evening, coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death." The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, "Oh nonsense!" and stood over him as if transfixed. (111)

Despite Marlow standing directly in front of him with the light, Kurtz was so enveloped in the darkness that he could no longer see the light. With this complete release of the influence of light, the force of the wilderness encompasses Kurtz. Marlow fully understands this victory of the darkness in the vision he has of Kurtz soon after his death. Marlow describes,

He lived then before me; he lives as much as he ever lived – a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me – the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart – the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness. (117)

Marlow acknowledges the fact that the darkness of the wilderness has taken over Kurtz in his death. The shadow of Kurtz is described as dark, brought to this darkness by its complete assimilation into the wilderness. Through this

triumph, the wilderness has stripped the light of society away from, Kurtz, leaving him completely a product of his own innate natural darkness.

Kurtz is conquered by the darkness because he fought against it so strongly. With the acknowledgement of deep connection between the essence of humanity and the wilderness, this darkness no longer has a destructive force over the individual. While trying to maintain his belief that society defines men, Kurtz never faces his fear of the wilderness. Instead of trying to understand and accept the darkness he tries to conquer it with light. Marlow understands the courage necessary to face this darkness. Describing those who venture into Africa, Marlow states, "They were men enough to face the darkness." (19) He realizes that it takes strength to even look at the darkness and accept its existence. While within the confines of society, people need not ever open themselves up to the possibility of the direct influence of the darkness. But because of the deep pull of the wilderness, those who turn to look into the darkness need strength.

The extent to which Kurtz attacks nature and forces his European influence upon the wilderness is not paralleled in all characters. Marlow is able to observe the interaction of the light and darkness and accept the role of both. Through his understanding of these interactions, he is caught in a perpetual duality between the two. He understands and respects the power of the darkness as it is an innate part of all humans, and he accepts that in order to live within society, a certain amount of light must be embraced and accepted. As Marlow exists, caught between these two choices, his ultimate

powerlessness is shown. He realizes that life exists in these two states, but do both simply exist, beyond his control of comprehension. On the boat, the narrator describes Marlow as he recounts the story of his journey,

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out. (80)

At this point, Marlow is neither completely defined by society nor completely ruled by nature. He exists in a plane which involves a consciousness of both. Ultimately, his knowledge of the darkness becomes more defining than his knowledge of the light, as shown by the match going out. He is no longer able to hide in the light and avoid the darkness. He must acknowledge both choices as existing and accept his own inability to find the more 'true' of the two worlds.

Upon returning to Europe, Marlow encounters the personification of societal ignorance in the character of The Intended. She has no idea of the way and degree in which Kurtz was overtaken by darkness. Beyond this, she does not even know that such darkness exists. In her reality, shielded completely by the constructs of society, Kurtz dies the same man he was when he left: accomplished, well known and well liked; a man who was very good at living in society. Unlike Kurtz, The Intended did not see the darkness and choose to fight it, but rather is completely unaware of the existence of the deeper truth that lies in the dark wilderness. Upon meeting The Intended, Marlow explains,

I noticed she was not very young – I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. (119)

This imagery demonstrates the struggle between the truth which Marlow has come to understand and the ignorance of The Intended. The room is dark with the facts of Kurtz's death which Marlow has come to explain to The Intended, contrasted with the intense light of ignorance centered on the forehead of The Intended. As Marlow realizes the intensity with which she loves the idea of Kurtz as he was before the influence of the darkness, he begins to understand that there is no way in which to convey the truth of the wilderness to her because of the strength of her convictions in societal foundations. Marlow explains,

"You knew him best," I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love. (120)

As the contrast between the light and dark grows, the ability of Marlow to attempt and bridge that gap is lost. The Intended is so blinded, much like the picture of the blindfolded woman, by the ideas and definitions of society that she could not see the truth which Marlow and Kurtz realized even if Marlow presented it to her.

Marlow presents this same idea to the narrator while he is recounting his story. He attempts to explain the realization of the truth in darkness and the ignorance and falsity contained in the influence of society. In explaining what ultimately destroyed Kurtz, he states,

The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible – it was not good for one either – trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land – I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you? – with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums – how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude – utter solitude without a policeman – by the way of silence – utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. (81-82)

Marlow grasps that while under the influence of society, it is impossible to completely shed that ignorance and see the truth contained in the darkness. This is only possible through a scary journey in which the only influences present are the self and the passions of the wilderness. In order to fully see into the heart of humanity, it is necessary to completely let go of culture. As long as an individual is holding onto a belief in or tie to culture, it is impossible to reach the truth. The truth of humanity lies outside of this societal refinement of the individual. Rather it lies in the wild passions to which nature speaks. If this nature is seen and fought against, it will ultimately lead to the destruction of the individual, as it did for Kurtz.

Through Kurtz's moment of clarity, Marlow is able to understand the struggle and ultimately downfall of Kurtz. Marlow's observations serves as the introduction and background for his ability to understand the experience and ultimately mistake of Kurtz as well as the implications of this on life. Marlow realizes,

Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up – he had judged. “The horror!” (113)

He realizes in this moment what was meant by Kurtz’s comment ‘The horror’.

He finally realizes that this darkness is a part of him, through the struggle with which, he has brought about his own destruction. He realizes the disconnection between the light and the dark, the ignorance which exists in the light of society and the truth of the innate connection between wilderness and the core of each human. Though Marlow understands this moment of clarity Kurtz experiences, he is able to look beyond this and come to an understanding beyond this.

In this interior story, Marlow sees through the character of Kurtz the distinction between a life lived in society and one lived in the wilderness. While this realization and conflict ultimately destroys Kurtz, Marlow is affected in a different manner. Through the more broad examination of the experience of Marlow, Conrad presents the reader with an interpretation which is not destructive, but based in the choice between these two worlds. This philosophy which Marlow ultimately touches upon is the idea that there is no ultimate truth which can be grasped and brings about a sense of peace. Both ways of living are simply living and cannot be connected to a greater sense of purpose or knowledge.

While there exist no direct answers to the questions of the ‘what, why and how’s of human existence, the most an individual can hope for and

ultimately attain is a knowledge of the self. After Kurtz dies, Marlow understands that following Kurtz on a search for an ultimate meaning is fruitless. While Marlow respected Kurtz, he realizes that life's meaning cannot be found through this struggle. Ultimately, Marlow understands the greater picture, beyond the conflict of light and dark itself. He states,

However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself – that comes too late – a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. (112-113)

Marlow understands the impossibility of assigning an ultimate truth to life. Rather, through this experience, he comes to understand that exactly the opposite is the only possibility. Neither society nor the wilderness hold some sense of ultimate existence, the most any individual can hope for is some understanding of the self. Beyond the self, the struggle between the two worlds holds nothing. The quest in search of a life which holds more value has neither victory nor defeat, simply a choice. While a devotion to one side of the conflict is satisfying, it is neither necessary nor ultimately better.

Both of the worlds presented as options are nightmares. As Marlow defends Kurtz's choice of living the natural life, choosing to disconnect himself

from society, he realizes that through this choice, Kurtz has achieved something remarkable. He has been able at least to step outside of the ignorance of society and make a choice. But what Marlow comes to realize while talking with the Manager about Kurtz is that it is not the life lived in wilderness that Marlow appreciates, but rather the choice itself. Marlow recounts,

“Do you,” said I, looking at the shore, “call it ‘unsound method’?”
 “Without doubt,” he exclaimed, hotly. “Don’t you?”... “No method at all,” I murmured after a while. “Exactly,” he exulted. “I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.” “Oh,” said I, “that fellow – what’s his name? – the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.” He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief – positively for relief. “Nevertheless, I think Mr Kurtz is a remarkable man,” I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a cold heavy glance, said very quietly, “He was,” and turned his back on me. My hour of favour was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares. (101)

Marlow understands that both choices hold only the struggle of life. There is nothing glamorous to be achieved through either world. No ultimate truth, or profound wisdom will be achieved through one path of life or the other, rather the only value lies in the choice. While Kurtz was able to see through the ignorance of a life lived catering to society, Marlow realizes that the existence Kurtz achieved holds nothing more profound. The great meaning of life is ultimately unknowable, hence making life simply a choice between nightmares.

As Marlow chooses his answer to the question of The Intended about Kurtz's last words, he experiences his moment of clarity. Marlow realizes that neither choice holds a profound difference. When he is presented with the opportunity to reveal 'the horror' which Kurtz saw to The Intended, Marlow chooses to maintain her ignorance and lie to her. Kurtz's last words were simply expressing his understanding of what he saw as the inferiority of life lived within society. What Marlow comes to understand is that this holds no more truth than the societal ignorance within which The Intended lives.

"His last word – to live with," she murmured. "Don't you understand I loved him – I loved him – I loved him!" I pulled myself together and spoke slowly. "The last word he pronounced was – your name." I heard a light sigh, and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. "I knew it – I was sure!" . . . She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark – too dark altogether. . . . (123)

In this moment of decision, Marlow expects there to be some consequence for his choice to lie to The Intended. He believed that there was somehow a correct choice, but upon his lie, he realizes that there is no better understanding, and so his lie holds no weight, it is simply a choice. In this moment, Marlow comes to understand that the only truth one can experience is the acknowledgment of the unknowable quality of life. While Marlow had struggled to try and pick a 'better' option, through the lack of consequence for

his life, he comes to understand the ultimate insignificance of his choice, for each life is simply a different nightmare.

As Conrad develops the character and experiences Kurtz, through the observations of Marlow, he is able to explain the necessary preliminary ideas behind his philosophy. The inner focus of Conrad's philosophy is the idea that society is used to mask the truth of human nature. Through the protective layers of society, individuals are able to repress and ignore the wild passionate core of humanity. Although it is possible to exist in this state of ignorance, Conrad shows that this is not a truthful existence. Through the experiences of the characters, he encourages the reader to delve deeper into their own desires and passions. He breaks down the traditional associations of light and dark in their representation of good and bad.

The reader is able to see the destruction brought about through the attitudes of the Europeans. The level of superiority the Europeans express toward the savages causes the reader to see the flaws in this way of thinking. The Europeans believe that because of their cultured societal positions, they have the right to take what they want from nature. Conrad uses Kurtz as the example for the negative effects of this attitude. Expressing the problems with this superiority, the philosophy centered on an acceptance and respect for the wild nature at the core of man is developed.

Conrad presents the reader with not only a philosophy highlighting the necessity to embrace the true nature of humanity, but with examples of how different attitudes toward this truth can affect individuals. Enforcing the idea

of negative effects of societal ignorance, Conrad's use of light and the character of The Intended provide tools through which the reader is shown realities about human existence and its deviation from its original nature. As the reader develops opinions about the characters and their actions, he or she internalizes the philosophy which Conrad presents through these characters. Through the sympathies of the reader for the characters, Conrad can influence at the very least an examination of the philosophy and the reader's life and at most, and adoption in some way of the philosophy which he presents.

Having established the conflict between the two worlds and the destructive power of this conflict through the character of Kurtz, Conrad is able to build the larger inability of conclusive understanding through the character of Marlow. Marlow's character is presented by the narrator as the epitome of this existence of unknowing. Marlow lives in an acceptance of both ways of life. He realizes the faults of each and understands that none of that matters. It is impossible to know that which gives meaning to life, and so life exists simply in the living in one of the two nightmares. This is shown through the characteristics of Marlow himself. The image of Marlow as an idol is used to bookend the novel, showing the lack of clarity which Marlow has reached as somehow the greatest understanding possible. The narrator describes as the story begins,

Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. (16)

At the closing of the story, the narrator again describes, “Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditation Buddha.” (123) Through this imagery, Conrad makes it apparent to the reader that Marlow is the figure which should be examined in order to find the philosophy he is presenting.

Marlow’s story serves as an encompassing shell around the inner story of Kurtz. It is necessary to examine the meaning in the inner story in order to then understand the meaning and significance of the outer piece, provided by Marlow. The difference in the nature of the two stories is emphasized by the narrator through an explanation of Marlow’s story telling tendencies and style. The narrator describes,

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (18)

This acknowledgement of the importance of the encompassing outer part of this story sets the stage for the reader to examine the story from this same viewpoint. Through this preparation, the reader is led into the dual-level philosophy presented by Conrad.

The reader is also clued in on the basic conclusion of Conrad’s philosophy very early on in the novel. With the understanding that the larger meaning of Marlow’s experience and story, surrounding the story of Kurtz,

Conrad is able to parallel the characteristics of Marlow's story with the characteristics of the philosophy presented. Before the story begins, the narrator states,

when he said, in a hesitating voice, "I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit," that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences. (21)

The inconclusive nature of Marlow's experiences is directly influenced by his clarity of the inconclusive nature of life. Through his understanding that there is no way to know completely, he experiences life through this lens. By providing the reader with an early introduction to Marlow's inconclusive nature, Conrad is able to frame the rest of the story as an explanation for this philosophical uncertainty.

Through this larger story, the philosophy of Conrad is more clearly explained. While an understanding of the existence of two options, the conflict between the two and the faults and meanings behind both is apparent through the inner story of Kurtz, this understanding is encompassed by the outer shell story of Marlow. The moment of clarity of Marlow and his realization of the lack of ability to know the meaning behind the choice he is presented with portrays to the reader the philosophy of Conrad. The reader is shown a philosophy which is based in the acceptance of not knowing. The deepest philosophic clarity which can be reached is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of knowing, and through this, the lack of a 'better' choice.

Synthesis

While these two novels both present the reader with a philosophy, clearly represented through the moment of clarity of a specific character, these philosophies differ greatly. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* presents a philosophy based in the importance of the simplicity of everyday moments. The relations and simple details hold the true meaning and provide life with a sense of satisfaction. Woolf uses the illusion of peace brought on by distance to illustrate the value of even the trials of daily life. Removal from these small moments in life serves to distance people and create a sense of a lacking connectedness. This true happiness and connection is not achievable through academic searching alone, but must be seen in the moments of true relations between individuals and the understanding of the importance of that which is simple in life. In contrast, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presents a philosophy which contrasts life within the ignorance of society and that lived in accordance with the wild passions of humanity, concluding that although both options exist, neither is greater. The ultimate choice doesn't matter, only the fact that there is a choice and the acceptance of the ultimate inability of men to know any greater sense of purpose or meaning.

While one of these novels urges the reader to look inward upon their own life and find importance in their daily simplicity, the other urges the reader to accept that looking inward is futile, and that peace is only obtainable through an acceptance of the ultimate unknowable manner of life. Woolf

brings life into small and simpler examinations, placing significance in aspects of life common to all of humanity. Conrad shows that no meaning at all can be derived from examination, and in that lays the only deeper meaning of life. The reader of Woolf's novel is provided a sense of hope and direction in from the philosophy which she portrays. The clear optimistic outlook of this philosophy is directly contrasted with the bleak lack of hope which Conrad's novel provides. Upon reading Conrad's novel, the reader is provided with a philosophy which reasons against any possibility of finding peace in the meaning of life.

Through the contrast of these two novels, and the philosophies which they present, it is clear how the device of literature can clearly be used to provide the reader with a direct connection to the philosophy. In *To the Lighthouse*, the reader is able to easily identify with the lives and experiences of the characters; the importance of these events can be directly examined in the reader's own life. In *Heart of Darkness*, the reader is able to identify with the struggle to choose between societal constructs and natural instincts and passions. While Marlow's experience is quite different than that which the average reader will ever experience, the emotions which he expresses and his descriptions of Kurtz's struggle all appeal to emotions which the reader can relate to.

The examination of these two novels provides a strong understanding of the use of moments of clarity to summarize and drive home the ideas presented throughout the development of a novel. Looking beyond this direct

interpretation of the philosophies presented there exists a larger picture of the place of novels an effective means through which to portray philosophy. Just as real life epiphanies, upon reading of a character's realization, the reader is able to revisit the past observations and actions throughout the novel with a more complete understanding and build new and more fully developed connections. Unlike philosophy which is presented in straight forward philosophical texts, the philosophies found in novels are able to influence the reader on a practical level. By appealing to the common aspects of humanity, emotions, actions and relations, these novels present the philosophies in a context which is applicable to the readers' lives.

Providing characters which elicit emotional connections with the reader, the authors are able to tie the realizations of the characters to those of the reader. Each reader will be able to either positively or negatively react to the characters and in doing so, build a reaction toward the philosophy. By making a character which appears to be crazy, loveable or worthy of respect, the author gives the specific actions and thoughts of the character a certain amount of credibility in the eyes of the reader. Through this method, literature is able to influence the receptive level of the reader without explicitly stating a positive or negative connotation.

Literature is a medium through which a story is told. Drawing on the fact that each individual is living out his or her own story, literature serves to appeal to readers on this level. Because literature is the telling of a story, the philosophy is based in the stories of the characters. While examining and

observing the story of the characters, the reader easily draws connections between the novel and his or her own story. When philosophical ideas are presented through the story, the reader can more clearly understand how the concepts of the philosophy are applicable to the story of his or her own life. Unlike a philosophy text based in the hypothetical, these representations of philosophy are clearly derived from, presented in and applicable to the reality of human life.

Without the use of philosophical jargon and convoluted hypothetical situations, Conrad and Woolf both successfully use literary philosophical moments of clarity as an alternative method of presenting philosophical ideas. Both Lily Briscoe and Marlow are characters whose moment of clarity allows for the reader to understand the implications behind the events, characters and messages of these novels. In the simple connections which can be made between the reader's life and the lives of the characters in the novels there exists a powerful tool for philosophical influence. As these two novels show, literature provides an unconventional vehicle for philosophy, which in its nontraditional methods achieves an incredibly effective level of connection and impact on the reader.

Works Cited

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc., 1955.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1995.